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SUBJECT: Vietnam Objects to Senate Letter on Father Ly

¶1. (SBU) Summary: A letter from 37 U.S. Senators to President Triet asking for the early release of Father Nguyen Van Ly drew sharply opposing responses from the Vietnamese Communist Party and the opposition Bloc 8406. The Party newspaper Nhan Dan ran a highly critical editorial condemning the Senate letter as an "incorrect act" based on "misinformation" that would "harm bilateral relations." This editorial marks an uptick in critical comments from Party mouthpiece Nhan Dan against U.S. policies in general and the U.S. Congress in particular. Leaders of Bloc 8406 released a public letter on July 6 heralding the Senate letter and its support for Father Ly as a co-founder of Bloc 8406 and pleading with the U.S. Senate to do more to assist prisoners of conscience in Vietnam. End Summary.

Nhan Dan Speaks Out Against U.S. Senate

¶2. (SBU) In response to the July 1 letter from 37 U.S. Senators asking for the release of imprisoned dissident Father Nguyen Van Ly, the official newspaper of the Communist Party, Nhan Dan, published a highly critical editorial criticizing the Senate for interfering in Vietnam's internal affairs. The editorial claimed the Senators were clearly "misinformed" about the case of Father Ly and said that the letter would harm bilateral relations. The editorial went on to criticize Father Ly directly, asking rhetorically "do the U.S. senators have enough information about actions against the State of Vietnam that Nguyen Van Ly carried out for decades? Do they know that during the court trial on Mar. 30, 2007 in Hue, Nguyen Van Ly had behaviors that seriously offended the court?" It continued on, saying that "it is hard to understand why some U.S. senators want to protect and defend him." The editorial proceeded to call on the Senate to be more "objective" when dealing with human rights issues in Vietnam and praised former Ambassador Peterson for saying "There is no perfect country in terms of human rights. We need to look at Vietnam's progress in the past 10, 20 years."

¶3. (SBU) This editorial follows earlier editorials criticizing U.S. and EU public statements opposing the arrest of attorney Le Cong Dinh. Additionally at the end of May, Nhan Dan ran another editorial attacking Congressman Ed Royce for attaching a rider to the House State Foreign Operations appropriations legislation that recommended Vietnam be returned to the Country of Particular Concern list on religious freedom.

Bloc 8406 Thanks Senate for Letter

¶4. (SBU) In an open letter to thank the U.S. Senate for its support of Father Ly, Bloc 8406 leaders Do Nam Hai, Father Phan Van Loi, Nguyen Chinh Ket and Tran Anh Kim (who was arrested on July 7) praised the Senate action on behalf of "their friend, a peaceful fighter" who has spent 17 years in Vietnamese prisons. They concluded their letter with the plea that the Senate "please continue to campaign for the liberation of Reverend Nguyen Van Ly and other prisoners of conscience in Vietnam, among who are 30 members of our Bloc 8406, and especially to campaign for our Vietnam

to have all the human rights as defined in the International Conventions that Vietnam has signed to participate in."

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